

An Extension Program Development Model for Out-of-School Time

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March 2002

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Based on a broad definition of out-of-school time programs, when it comes to program development, many approaches are possible. Programs are the proactive way that Extension professionals reach their audience, and they spend the majority of their time planning, implementing, and evaluating such educational programs. Recognizing that “while youth development happens everywhere and not just in programs, youth development programs are perhaps the most deliberate efforts to stimulate development”(Blyth, 2000), specific attention should be paid to models of program development. This section will describe a model for Extension program development for out-of-school time programs.

I have not been able to find documentation for the exact origin of this model; however, from my experience I know it was a tool developed by Extension professionals associated with School-Age Child Care Centers for Action and National Network for Child Care in the early 1990s. It was originally titled School-Age Child Care (SACC) Program Development Model, a reflection of the terminology in use during the time period in which it was developed. Using the model to explain programming possibilities has helped me to illustrate to Extension staff in what ways they may already be working in out-of-school time programs, or where the potential for such programming exists (e.g., see the document developed by Ferrari & Smith, 2001). Each type of program has unique features and challenges, and the Extension professional plays a different role in each. This model is one way to understand the unique features of each delivery method. As well, it provides an umbrella for grouping common programming goals. As with any

model, it is meant to represent reality, but it is not reality. Variations or hybrids of these program delivery models may now exist. A description of each portion of the model follows.

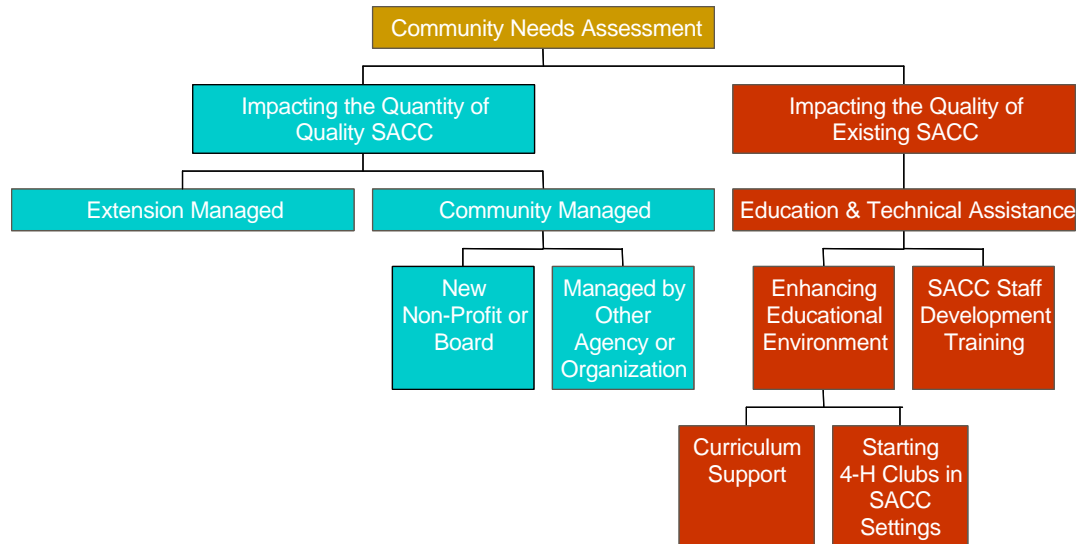


Figure 1
Extension Program Development Model for Out-of-School Time Programs

Community Needs Assessment

The foundation of the program development process is a community needs assessment. One such needs assessment process was pioneered in Extension by Riley (1992) at the University of Wisconsin, and this process has been used successfully by those in other states (see Hobbs, 1995; Hobbs & Chang, 1996; Karns & Stevens, 1995). There are many ways to assess needs, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to enumerate those here. However, the needs assessment process should be conducted in such a way as to determine if there is a need to increase quantity or increase quality,

recognizing that these two aims are not mutually exclusive. If the determination is made that the quantity of programs is lacking, then it goes without saying that the goal is to develop high quality programs to meet this need.

Impacting Program Quantity

Essentially, impacting the quantity of program means bringing new programs into being that did not exist before. This need is particularly crucial in communities where no options currently exist. Despite the increasing number of programs, there are still many areas of the country without sufficient out-of-school time options. From an Extension perspective, two basic models can be used to increase quantity: extension managed and community managed.

Extension Managed. As implied in the title, the Extension-managed model means that Extension staff bear the ultimate responsibility for the operation of the program. Simply put, it's your headache. In other words, if a staff member resigns, it is up to you to hire the replacement and to ensure that the program is adequately staffed in the interim period. If the program is funded through grants, meeting the requirements of the funding agency will be an additional responsibility. Because of the commitments involved, considerable thought should be given to this decision. Obtaining support from advisory groups would be an essential part of this decision-making process.

Community Managed. With the community-managed model, the Extension professional plays a different role. This role may involve bringing community leaders and concerned citizens together around the issue of out-of-school time, perhaps to conduct the needs assessment process. Or it may mean working with an existing group, such as the PTA, who has identified a need, but is not sure how to proceed. The culmination of such

a process may result in locating a community agency willing to undertake the responsibility of running the program or, if no such organizations are available, in creating a parent-run board to manage the program. The Extension professional may continue to work in a support role as the group gets established, and provide support in sustaining the program through areas such as grant writing and evaluation. Whichever route is pursued, the end result is that a new program is created and is now available to the community.

Impacting Program Quality

An extensive discussion of the characteristics of effective programs and program quality is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it bears mentioning here because the quality of the after-school environment is an important aspect of understanding the effects of after-school programs on youth (Vandell & Posner, 1999). Fashola (1998) concluded that there is no straightforward answer to the question of what works best in after-school programs, believing that “the answer depends on why the program was set up, the extent to which the program designed addresses the needs of the participants, and the extent to which the program shows positive outcomes when evaluated for evidence of effectiveness” (Fashola, 1998). Despite that assertion, there is general agreement about elements that contribute to program quality (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Gootman, 2000; U.S. Departments of Education & Justice, 1998, 2000). Youth in all types of programs, whether academic, recreational, or cultural in focus, appear to benefit from consistent structure, active community involvement, extensive training for staff and volunteers, and responsiveness to participants’ needs and interests (Fashola, 1998; Gootman, 2000). As well, programs should provide a variety of activities (Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996); these

activities and the context of the program should be developmentally appropriate, addressing the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional needs of youth.

That being said, the difference with the strategies on the program quality side of the Program Development Model is that the Extension professional works with existing programs conducted by other organizations to provide educational support. There are two basic strategies to increase program quality: staff development and training and enhancing the educational environment.

Staff development and training. In this model, staff Extension may provide education and technical assistance to other groups who are starting or working to improve out-of-school time programs. This assistance may be provided on a small scale (e.g., one-on-one consultation) or a larger scale. Specifically, Extension professionals may provide educational experiences for staff of out-of-school time programs by request, as a planned part of their program on a regular and frequent basis, or through specialized events such as statewide conferences. They may provide workshops on topics such as child development, experiential education, parent involvement, strategic planning, evaluation, and so forth.

Enhancing the educational environment. Extension staff may provide education and technical assistance to enhance the educational environment of out-of-school time programs. There are many ways to enhance the educational environment, but the primary way that Extension staff do so is through curriculum support. Providing curriculum support may mean supplying curriculum materials, and perhaps training, to program sites and having the program staff use that curriculum in their program. Alternately, an Extension professional, program assistant, or volunteer may actually do the teaching

directly with the program participants. Perhaps the closest “relative” is the 4-H school enrichment delivery model and its variations.

A specific variation of this model is that of starting 4-H clubs in out-of-school programs, or what might be termed as a “club within a club.” In other words, the 4-H club operates within the structure of the community-based organization that sponsors the after-school program. This model works when the goals of the two organizations are compatible and there is a shared sense of ownership (Hartzell, 2001). It may mean that 4-H is offered on a particular day of the week or that particular projects are offered. There may be designated time for club meetings, where youth say the 4-H pledge, have officers, and make choices about activities to pursue. As well, the person responsible may be staff paid by Extension (e.g., program assistant), staff of the organization running the program (e.g., Boys & Girls Club), a volunteer, or some combination. The Extension professional works collaboratively with the after-school program to implement this model. Equipping others with the skills and confidence to carry out 4-H club activities extends the reach to those youth who otherwise might not get a chance to participate in 4-H programs.

Extension staff may choose one or more ways to approach program development in the out-of-school time. Choosing one model does not eliminate others from consideration. However, staff may make decisions based on community needs, as well as their program priorities and their own areas of expertise. Staff who have had the experience with one or more delivery models can be a valuable resource to others who are contemplating similar programs. The creation of networks for sharing such expertise can be accomplished through national initiatives and regional and state-level efforts.

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